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MONTANA VOTER REVIEW: THE CASE FOR CITY-COUNTY CONSOLIDATION

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Lauren S. McKinsey

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on
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INTRODUCTION

In 1963, voters in Silver Bow County, Montana passed judgment on a city-county consolidation proposal for the third time in 40 years. It was soundly defeated and some, like Charlie Reed who wrote the following letter to the Montana Standard, felt that the lesson might finally sink in:

> Dear Sir:
>
> Won't these consolidationists and do-gooders ever learn?
> Tuesday's election should make it clear to them that Butte is our town and the majority of the voters like it just the way it is.
> If they want to live in a decent, clean, and progressive town, why don't they go somewhere else.

Many have done so, but enough seasoned campaigners are still around to lead one more effort in 1976.

The consolidation fever in Butte-Silver Bow may be symptomatic of a new strain of merger-urge. A surprising increase in the frequency of attempts to create consolidated city-county local governments has occurred in the last decade. Activity continues in the South, where most previous efforts have been made, but there is also new interest among both practicioners and local government analysts in the West. Paradoxically, this interest does not appear to be dampened by the prevailing poor record of success in achieving voter approval of consolidation plans. This continuing enthusiasm in the face of predictable failure may be the most interesting theoretical aspect of the process.[1] And the fact that consolidation is the most dramatic

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[1]Greer notes: "of metropolitan revolutionaries one may say, with literal truth, 'they went forth to battle but they always fell.' How, then, is it possible to account for this recurrent though bootless effort?" (1963, p. 21).

method of changing local government jurisdictions justifies continued academic focus. An explanation of why and how consolidations succeed should be part of any general theory of political change.

A survey of the literature on consolidation reveals a limited number of contributions in the area of general theory. Systematic analysis remains in the early stages, perhaps because of the relative few cases for comparison. There are several good intensive case studies, two or three frameworks for comparative case study analysis, a few attempts to classify variables and generalize from case studies but no exhaustive explanatory theories. This paper attempts to develop a framework for analysis (exploratory theory) while offering a critique of current explanatory theory. The framework is applied to Butte-Silver Bow and two other current consolidation attempts in Montana which provide additional case studies for comparative analysis.

A VARIETY OF ANALYTICAL APPROACHES

Consolidation case studies and comparative analysis usually deal with one or more of the following topics: (1) environmental factors; (2) proposal components; (3) process variables; (4) voter reaction; (5) general theory.[2] These categories are not mutually exclusive and they are intended only to provide a convenient means

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[2] This paradigm can be compared with Rosenbaum and Henderson's which identifies four kinds of analysis of consolidation struggles: (1) impressionistic historical studies; (2) studies that treat consolidation as a political "sport"; (3) studies that focus upon voting behavior in consolidation efforts; and (4) studies that seek a general explanation for consolidation campaigns. (1972, p. 439).

of describing some of the analysis which has been made. The listing also does not attempt to account for a number of studies done subsequent to consolidation adoptions which assess actual reform experience in comparison with promised governmental performance.[3]

(1) Environmental. Analysis in this category deals primarily with the nature of the consolidation setting and usually summarizes selected case studies. Two main approaches can be identified. The first assesses the metropolitan milieu which allegedly produces consolidation attempts. The list is a familiar one including: proliferation and fragmentation of local governments, duplication of functions, overlapping service delivery, inadequate planning, urban sprawl and tax and service inequity.[4] The litany surfaces in the report of every study commission or research organization hired to do a consolidation feasibility study.

The recitation is misleading because it identifies neither the urban conditions necessary for proposing consolidation nor the sufficient reasons for its acceptance by a local electorate. Other metropolitan settings display similar or more disabling

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[3]For example, Grant's study of Nashville (1965), Carver's analysis of Jacksonville (1973), the NACO symposium (1973) or McArthur's assessment of the impact on the rural-urban fringe in Nashville (1972).

[4]Rehfuss notes that these conditions promote one of four available summary views of the problems of the metropolis, all of which imply some variation of metropolitan government as the solution: "fragmented-government approach (the cartographers), the area-wide services group (the service purveyors), those who decry urban life and its quality (the aethetes), and finally, the seekers of process of government (the demos)." (1968, p. 106).

characteristics and yet no consolidation attempts have been proposed. It has not been established that the severity of urban environmental problems constitutes an imperative for consolidation.[5] Nor does the magnitude of the problem correlate with success at the polls. Analysis in this area must establish the degree to which perceptions of problems such as duplication and inefficiency are first developed by metropolitan residents and then transformed into support for consolidation proposals. Analysis in this category tends to be prescriptive, or even wishful thinking, instead of descriptive and comparative.

The second environmental approach includes studies of patterns of interaction in the metropolitan unit to be consolidated in order to establish the probability of voter approval. The focus is upon factors such as homogeneity and heterogeneity of the area, social distance between territorial components of the unit, the flow of transactions across the components,[6] relative economic disparities or patterns of political party conflict or consensus. Virtually every quantifiable variable has been tested and many contradictory conclusions reached.[7] Some of the relatively simplistic answers provided a few years ago have

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[5]Although Martin argues that: "Contiguous geographical areas which are socially, economically, and politically interdependent upon one another must consolidate and unify their separate governmental structures if they are to survive." (1968, p. vii).

[6]An exhaustive documentation of the literature concerned with the effect of differential spatial patterns in the metropolitan area is found in Schiltz and Moffit (1971).

[7]The dialogue between Hawkins (1969) and Rosenthal (1970) over the relative importance of political-structural and social-environmental variables in producing favorable consolidation outcomes is illustrative.

been discarded in favor of more complex but still tentative generalizations.[8]

The two environmental approaches complement each other to the extent that the metropolitan community can be discovered to contain the linkages necessary to overcome the patterns of fragmentation identified as causing the problems. Transaction flow analysis, for example, can identify the economic community of interest which is required to overcome the economic spatial urban differentiation (suburban/urban, living/work patterns) which reputedly creates the need for consolidation.[9] Analysis of partisan political orientations can confirm the pattern of secondary cleavages which either reinforces or overcomes the primary pattern of economic or social cleavages.[10] The environmental setting by itself may explain the result of the entire consolidation effort.[11]

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[8]Marando and Wanemaker attempt to resolve the Hawkins-Rosenthal dispute in reaching more complex answers: "There is no simple answer to the question as to whether social factors or politics have the greater impact on city-county consolidation... We feel that there is a good deal of interrelationship between the social and political factors (1972, pp. 521, 522).

[9]For example, success the second time around in Miami-Dade County may have resulted in part from the fact that: "Economic and social disparities between the central city and the suburban area are relatively unimportant in Dade County." (Lotz, 1973, p. 12).

[10]Banfield framed the answer to consolidation's failure in terms of the simple "political arithmetic" of the two-party system cleavage between the core city and suburbia (1957).

[11]Marando argues that the "selection of the metropolitan area in which a reorganization is to be implemented is more important than the reform process" itself to the outcome of the vote. (1974, p. 256).

(2) Proposal. Approaches in this category classify consolidations according to the kind of plan which is proposed, including its degree of complexity, its extent of change from the status quo and its inclusion of specific details with strong positive or negative effect on voters. Merger terminology includes categories such as total consolidation, partial consolidation, confederation or "two-tier" plan. Consolidations also are usually placed on a continuum with other solutions to the urban crisis such as annexation, functional consolidation, interlocal agreement or other, more radical, answers.[12]

Two somewhat contradictory conclusions have resulted from the analysis of proposals. Studies often conclude that the poor success record of total consolidation does not justify the extensive effort required.[13] Less drastic solutions are recommended as the realistic means of bringing territory and jurisdiction into congruence.[14] Additional case studies are necessary to reinforce this conclusion. There is also a need to consider the possibility that a "failure" of formal consolidation at the polls can lead to "success" in terms of subsequent functional consolidation.

The second conclusion is that the particular details of a

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[12] Examples of comprehensive treatments of this nature include A.C.I.R. (1962); Martin (1963) or Zimmerman (1970).

[13] In the words of Robert Wood: "...the metropolitan juggernaut is a grand illusion." (1975).

[14] An example is Atlanta-Fulton County where the peculiar jurisdictional problems have stimulated consideration of a wide range of alternative solutions. See Holland (1952) and Institute of Public Administration (1970).

proposed consolidation plan have little effect upon the referendum outcome.[15] Most voters are aware of neither the set of conditions justifying consolidation nor the main aspects of the consolidation proposal. This oblivion extends sometimes even to the community notables on both sides of the issue.[16] This conclusion is distressing for reform and for the reformers who believe in the importance of compromise in drafting and enthusiasm in campaigning. It suggests also that the importance of the difference between drafting a total and a partial consolidation has been overestimated. Herein lies the contradiction in proposal analysis. Further corroborative study is required since simple logic suggests that voters will understand and react to some information of a plan.[17]

(3) Process. Analysis of the process through which consolidation is originated, formulated and finally presented to the voters necessarily focuses on a disparate set of actors.[18]

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[15] In Jacksonville, argues DeGrove, the actual details of the plan were insignificant: "In short, things seem to have sunk so low that almost any change would have been welcome." (1973, p. 19). In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, DeGrove argued that, "Years of effort went down the drain with little discussion of the merits of the consolidation plan itself." (A.C.I.R., 1973, p. 4).

[16] Rosenbaum and Henderson point out: "...there was little evidence from our interviews that most respondents (community influentials) had studies the plans carefully and were capable of discussing the implications of various details." (1973, p. 258).

[17] For example, Marando's study of 24 consolidation efforts between 1945 and 1970 demonstrated that features of consolidation plans, such as proposed number of separately elected administrators, correlate positively with voter support (1973).

[18] Most of the case studies have looked carefully at the process variables. The best narrow analysis of campaign actions is probably the Rosenbaum and Henderson study of the attitudes of community leaders (1973).

Different parts of the process may receive differential attention depending on observer interest but campaigns usually are highlighted. The importance of the drafting stage probably has been minimized to the extent that the plan's configeration is not believed to be as important to the final vote as the dynamics of the campaign stage. But observers and participants both should recognize that since the process is an inclusive one, the bargaining tone established during the drafting stage influences later efforts to win community group endorsement.

Roles examined include those of study commissions, elected officials, local government employees, reputed community leaders, support and opposition groups, the media and others.[19] Campaigns can be categorized according to basic type (media or personal contact) intensity of effort, use of resources, duration and other variables. A still valid researchable question is the relationship between the kind of community and the kind of campaign with special focus on smaller units where success may be more likely to result from an intense personal contact approach.

The greatest shortcoming in process analysis is its failure to give proper attention to the initial phase of placing consolidation on the civic agenda. This stage includes the constitutional-statutory setting,[20] the role of preliminary

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[19] See Bollens and Schmandt (1970, pp. 373-395) for a summary of the role dynamics in metropolitan reorganization campaigns.

[20] Charles Adrian called for greater emphasis to be placed on the legal environment in which consolidation takes place, a focus that has been "scorned by 'process-oriented' political scientists." (Booth, 1963, p. 3).

study groups, chambers of commerce, university personnel, and elected officials. Taken together, these conditions constitute either an impeding labyrinth or a facilitative mechanism for framing consolidation as the answer to urban maladies. This stage has an important influence on the referendum batting average of consolidations. That average is deceptive since it says nothing about the suitability of consolidation for the particular urban area. If there are basically facilitative environments which allow for consolidations to be easily framed where they are not suited, then the record of success is misleading. Alternatively, if the legal-institutional labyrinth is so complex that legitimate consolidation efforts are not even posed as alternatives, the success ratio is correspondingly lower. An exhaustive process analysis needs to tie together all three of the stages identified: preliminary, drafting, and campaign.

(4) Voter Reaction. Most consolidation efforts ultimately must face the crucial test of voter approval. The majority fail. The case studies have provided a collection of hypotheses regarding "successful" and "unsuccessful" mergers. Consolidation voting studies have followed in the general tradition of voter analysis in political sociology and have built upon the methodology and findings of pioneering studies of annexation behavior.[21] The studies fall into two categories: aggregate data analysis and survey research.

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[21] Dye provides an illustration of the relationship between annexation analysis and overall urban integration (1964).

Aggregate data analysis overlaps environmental analysis to the extent that it relies on categories of political demography within the metropolitan area (core city, suburban fringe, rural area) for the purpose of explaining differential voting.[22] Expectedly, attitudes correlate with place of residence since consolidation alters directly the effects of residence.[23] Residence often disguises other factors such as education, income, or ethnicity which may have an independent effect on attitudes.[24] For this reason, survey research is needed to augment aggregate data analysis.

Survey research can identify the reasons for voter support or opposition, the nature of the arguments and themes which are conveyed in a campaign and the effectiveness of the vehicles through which messages are delivered.[25] Survey research complements both process analysis and environmental analysis. It is essential to the development of comprehensive theory which must link micro-analysis and macro-analysis.

(5) Comprehensive Theory. Consolidation provides a rich theoretical testing ground because of the nature and number of

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[22] Hawkins (1967), Marando (1973) provide two examples of this methodology.

[23] This assumption is confirmed by the earlier studies of annexation referenda (Mushkatel, Wilson, and Mushkatel, 1973), Hawkins' study of Nashville's consolidation also focused on the importance of heightened salience of residence because of annexation. (1966, p. 134).

[24] Booth's study of Nashville was an early attempt to establish this relationship (1963, p. 53), Wilson and Banfield's concept of public regardedness is in the same tradition (1964).

[25] The classic examples of this approach is Greer's study of St. Louis, Cleveland and Atlanta (1963).

variables. Many hypothesis have been tested in studies falling within the four categories just discussed but they have not been brought together in a single theory. An interesting attempt to create comprehensive theory is Rosenbaum and Henderson's adaptation of the theory of revolutionary change to consolidation.[26] Briefly summarized, their assumption is that because comprehensive consolidation represents extreme disruption of patterns of citizen orientation to local government, voter approval occurs only within a narrow set of facilitative conditions. These conditions are approximated in revolution, or social disequilibrium which is addressed insufficiently by social and governmental institutions. This approach clearly deserves a closer critique than it has been given. With modification, it might provide the basis of an exploratory framework for analyzing existing and future case studies.

Initially, it may seem surprising to describe consolidation in terms applied to revolution. It is not altogether clear whether Rosenbaum and Henderson intend to identify the nature of the conditions precipitating change, the character of activities of the actors in the process, or the degree of change which is proposed.[27] They do identify the consolidation solution as a radical departure from the existing governmental

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[26] The authors use the approach of Chalmers Johnson which describes revolution in terms of disruption of a satisfactory relationship between social values and environmental conditions. (1972, p. 445).

[27] Greer has noted the paradoxically revolutionary character of American metropolitan reform: "The inherited morality plays of American civic life may be seen as a conservative tradition of radical reform, conservative in the proceedings used in change but radical in the consequences expected." (1962, p. 3).

structure but also emphasize the radical societal dislocation which is necessary to produce acceptance of such radical change.[28] To this extent, the utility of their model is limited. It applies only to the relatively few examples of comprehensive consolidation which are among many reorganization attempts. And the authors define comprehensive consolidation theoretically without providing operational measures for dichotomizing comprehensive from partial consolidations. They fail to identify which empirical consolidation cases they consider to be comprehensive.

Thus, the model applies only to a narrow set of conditions at the extreme end of the governmental reorganization continuum. This narrow delineation makes it easy to postulate that the conditions necessary to overcome people's reluctance to accept sweeping change are correlated directly with the actual extent of the change proposed.[29] Therein lies the basis of a broader theory. Voter support needs to be viewed as a point on a continuum and the reorganization plan as a point on another continuum. At each point along the reorganization continuum, a different set of circumstances leading to consolidation can be identified. It is expected that voter support is more likely in those cases where less dramatic change is proposed.[30] Therefore,

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[28] The authors refer to a "period of rapid environmental change preceding the consolidation campaign." (1972, p. 451).

[29] Sweeping change is defined as that which "disrupts the citizen's established orientation toward his local governmental institutions and symbols." (1972, p. 435).

[30] Scott reaches this conclusion after applying the continuum framework to eighteen metropolitan reorganizations between 1950 and 1961. Unfortunately, like Rosenbaum and Henderson, he dichotomized voter approval into success and failure without creating a continuum of support. (1968, p. 253).

to the extent that a consolidation is partial, rather than total, less resistance should be expected. Thus, Rosenbaum and Henderson's theory of complete consolidation is really an explanation of the deviant cases at the extreme end of the continuum since it helps to explain why expected failures occasionally do not materialize.

In addition, the Rosenbaum-Henderson model may not adequately explain even the examples of comprehensive consolidations. Only Jacksonville seems to fit the model well.[31] This paper outlines the test of an alternative hypothesis which postulates that consolidation's acceptability depends on the very degree to which it is seen as familiar rather than as revolutionary. Many other kinds of local government reorganization were initiated in situations of crisis but have become more routinely accepted with the passage of time and the practice of emulation. This same pattern might eventually fit consolidation.

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[31] Marando argues:

> "The community problems which stimulated most governmental reform efforts were of a non-crisis nature. In no metropolitan area examined was there a problem of crisis proportions that threatened an immediate breakdown of local governance....The experience of Jacksonville-Duval County, Florida, appears to be the only exception where the severity of urban problems led to consideration of reform." (1974, p. 235).

And one observer tempers this conclusion:

> "In Jacksonville, consolidation was made possible by two factors: (1) A history of government reorganization efforts...and (2) Governmental corruption...Consolidation in Jacksonville-Duval County can be viewed as the cullmination of an evolutionary process...(Young, 1969).

This alternative postulation finds support in the literature of regional and international integration. Previous integrative experience,[32] for example, is considered to be a facilitative variable. People become habituated to a pattern of activity. A consolidation plan's radical edge is blunted through repetitious submission to the public.[33] The plan might remain the same but perceptions of it change. The concept of "spillover," also used in international relations, explains the method of incremental, rather than revolutionary, breakdown of resistance to integration.[34] The creation of a larger territorial scale on relatively minor functions allows for habituation to the larger framework and leads to eventual extension of more important functions area-wide. While functional integration in urban areas has not followed this pattern,[35] the relationships have not been fully explored. There is some evidence

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[32] Jacob, (1964).

[33] Marando argues that repeated attempts do not guarantee consolidation's success (1974, p. 233), but his own data implies that voter support grows in multiple referendums: (Miami-Dade County (1953, 1957), (49.2%, 51.0%); Nashville-Davidson County (1958-1962), (47.3%, 56.8%); St. Louis-St. Louis County (1959, 1962), (27.5%, 40.1%); Chattanooga-Hamilton County, Tenn. (1964, 1970), (19.2%, 48.0%); Tampa-Hillsborough County, Fla. (1967, 1970, 1972), (28.4%, 42.0%, 42.0%); Athens-Clark County, Ga. (1969, 1972), (48.0%, 48.3%); Augusta-Richmond County, Ga. (1971, 1974), (41.5%, 51.5%); Durham-Durham County, N.C. (1961, 1974), (22.3%, 32.1%). There are no cases here of a decline in support and some examples of dramatic increase which fell short of success. (Marando, 1975, p. 77).

[34] Haas, (1958, p. xiii).

[35] Zimmerman argues that functional consolidation often either satisfies the need for integration in a particular urban setting or at least deflects the drive for total merger (1973).

that functional consolidations follows unsuccessful attempts at total consolidation and a belief that this in turn might prompt a later attempt at total consolidation.

The important point is that the single event of consolidation cannot be viewed in an isolated context of "revolution."[36] The fact that the frequency of consolidation attempts is increasing is more important than the fact that, for the moment, the success ratio at the ballot box has not risen. The existing success ratio, multiplied times an increase in attempts, will eventually produce a greater frequency of success and more examples for emulation by neighboring local government units.

This relationship, between the process of placing consolidation on the civic agenda initially and its eventual judgment at the polls, has been addressed insufficiently by the Rosenbaum-Henderson model and by others. The knowledge of why some likely metropolitan settings do not propose consolidation is incomplete. A closer look is needed at the sequence of constitutional and legal factors which may either impede or facilitate framing consolidation as a study alternative. In some instances, the effort necessary to run the gamut of constitutional amendments, special legislation or judicial interpretation may seem fruitless.[37]

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[36] Rosenthal, in a critique of Hawkins' study (1969), opposes studying a referenda as though it were a discrete act: "What precisely is the logic of an argument which does not take into account the tenacity evidenced in those 'multiple-action' cities which repeatedly bring integration proposals before the public?... fails to take into account how contingent effects of previous decisions in a given city may influence his statistical results?" (1970, p. 545).

[37] Or, veto power by local officials may deter reformers who may be willing to traverse the other stages. For a recent example of this local "oversight" function in the case of Richland County-Columbia, S.C., see Zimmerman (1972, pp. 418-419).

On the other hand, if consolidations are easy to frame as reform alternatives even when serious conditions are absent, then the low level of voter enthusiasm can be explained. An exhaustive theory of consolidation should conceptualize both a formulation phase and a campaign phase divided by the actual drafting process. The Montana case studies provide a basis for examining this approach.

THE MONTANA VOTER REVIEW APPROACH

Voters in three Montana counties will consider the merits of city-county consolidation in referendums in 1976. The Montana setting offers the opportunity to explore further two facets slighted in the Rosenbaum-Henderson model: consolidation as non-revolutionary change and the importance of the pre-formulation stage. The characteristics of the three case studies also provide for application of selected assumptions raised elsewhere in the literature. The most important characteristic is the state-wide process within which the consolidations are occuring. This process, called voter review, allows for the application of a quasi-experimental design[38] since numerous factors are held constant across the three case studies.

The 1972 Montana Constitution contains a unique local government article which mandates a study of the existing form of government in every city, town and county irrespective of any clear need for reform. Study commissioners were elected in

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[38] This approach is developed by Campbell and Stanley, (1963).

1974 to achieve this task and subsequently to propose an alternative form for voter choice in or before the November, 1976 general election. Each study commission can choose from among a wide range of familiar local forms such as mayor-council, commission, or manager or can select something new such as the town meeting or the parliamentary form. They may create their own combination of features through a charter. Or the study commission may choose a jurisdictional solution, such as disincorporation for towns or functional consolidation through service transfer, confederation, or consolidation for cities and counties.

It is within this context that consolidations are being attempted in three of the dozen largest Montana counties: Missoula, Silver Bow and Deer Lodge. There are troublesome urban problems in each of these settings but there is no evidence of social disequilibrium, widespread perception of lame institutional response or a growing power vacuum in any. According to the Rosenbaum-Henderson model there is no realistic expectation for the consolidation plans to succeed. But relatively comprehensive consolidation proposals have been drafted and if any are adopted the answer will have to found in the constellation of variables in the overall voter review process.

There is a basis for assuming that the artificial accelerator[39] provided by voter review can compensate significantly

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[39] Rosenbaum and Henderson identify an "accelerator" in successful consolidations, a crisis or scandal which enhances success or, rather, "will be absolutely essential to the campaign's success." (1972, p. 454).

for the absence of the sequence of crisis-reaction variables proposed in the Rosenbaum-Henderson model. The chief variable is the universal, mandated nature of voter review which forces every unit to propose some change. But while this dimension of the constitutional-legal setting is basically facilitative, it has not produced frivolous consolidation because of one restraining factor. A concurrent majority of the separately elected city and county study commissions is necessary in order to propose consolidation as the alternative form. This provision posed a vexing problem for months for the two Missoula groups who lack consensus. And consolidation was rejected in Yellowstone County, the state's largest, when the study commission for the city of Billings voted 4-3 against consolidation following a 3-2 favorable vote of the county study commission. Also, the legislation creating alternative forms is so flexible that local units with minor jurisdictional problems can resolve the difficulty by placing a simpler functional consolidation on the ballot.[40]

On balance, the fact of these three active consolidation efforts attests to the facilitative advantage of voter review in the process of framing consolidation as the ballot choice. There is little reason to believe that any of these localities would be trying consolidation otherwise even though consolidation has been available since 1923. On the other hand, these

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[40]To date, three other towns ranging in size from 750 to 3,300 have chosen to disincorporate as a side-door approach to consolidation which requires only a majority of the town for approval, and a handful have selected law enforcement transfers as ballot alternatives.

are the Montana cases where consolidation is most suited. In fact, two of the three have made earlier consolidation attempts under different circumstances.

The next question is whether or not this facilitative influence extends through the drafting and campaign stages. Voter review has several characteristics, mostly facilitative, which are likely to influence the outcome of the three consolidation referendums. First of all, the local study commissioners are elected and have the status of mini-constitutional convention delegates. This status can be used to legitimize their proposals at the polls.

They need to emphasize that they were elected directly by the people; that they recommended consolidation as the best alternative only after nearly two years of study in which hearings were open to the public and citizen input was solicited constantly; and that the people themselves now have the final judgment of the merits of their work. The study commissioners can claim that they were delegated to frame the best possible choice consistent with the Jeffersonian philosophy that each generation should choose its own form of government.[41] The voter review process sets a supportive campaign backdrop: the opportunity has been provided, but it is up to the study commissioners themselves to capitalize upon it.

There is one balancing consideration in this factor. Local officials believed that voter review was to be carried out by

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[41]This theme is available because the voter review process is mandated every ten years, or half-a-generation no less.

citizens appointed by local officials rather than by citizens elected by other citizens. The legislature reasoned otherwise, noting that this would provide some local officials the opportunity to impede reforms such as consolidation. Consequently, there are no requirements for approval of proposal aspects by local governing bodies at any stage of the process. But, because of the limited role they are allowed to play, some local officials may oppose the consolidation recommendation. Since elected officials are probably the single most pivotal group in a reform campaign, this element of voter review could be construed as having a negative impact.

This relationship is, therefore, complex. It could be argued that elected study commissioners would be more likely than appointed ones to reach a drastic recommendation such as consolidation. It could also be argued that a consolidation recommendation of a study commission appointed by local officials would be more likely to have their support and thus would be more likely to pass. This distinction illustrates further the importance of separating the factors in the formulation stage from those in the voter approval stage.

The wide range of alternative choices made available in voter review allows a community to select an alternative which is both an improvement and an acceptable change to voters. But if a study commission cannot decide whether inclusion of a particular structural component would spell defeat for the entire plan, they can place the controversial part as a separate ballot suboption for the voters. The voters can give their approval to the general plan and separate their disapproval for

the specific part. An example is the choice between partisan and non-partisan elections. This feature could be especially important in minimizing the impact of plans proposing consolidation since those plans make the greatest changes in local governmental structure.

In addition to the structural choices available to each study commission, there is also the option of adopting self-government powers. A consolidation can be given maximum structural and functional flexibility by drafting a charter with self-government powers. This combination provides the study commission with great campaign advantages. Consolidation can be depicted as a home-grown solution to local problems and a means of removing state control over local events. A calculated campaign could divert antagonism from structural aspects of the plan to the positive theme of self-government powers.

Voter review legislation gives the individual study commissions the choice of the general election, the primary election, school elections or a special election for presentation of their proposal. This discretion must be considered facilitative to the extent that the study commissioners themselves are able to assess the ideal time for maximum positive voter turnout. Two of the consolidations are scheduled for the June primary election where slightly lower turnouts are expected and, consequently, a mobilization of supportive groups could produce a favorable outcome. Silver Bow has chosen the general election where there will be a large turnout. Since 88 percent of the registered voters turned out in a special election on consolidation in 1963, there is no reason to believe that a special

election this time would produce a turnout lower than that of the general election. Many study commissioners rejected special elections on the ground of expected voter's wrath at the cost and inconvenience of still another election.

The financial aspects of voter review also deserve brief consideration. The legislature voted study funds to be matched by local monies for each study commission. Sufficient funds for quality studies have been made available though the evidence shows that the quality of the actual study has little effect on voter's perceptions or preferences.[42] Some of this money is available for selected public education and voter information activities and most of the commissions have ample resources left for this phase. Over the three-year life of voter review, funds for the three consolidation units total more than $75,000 for Missoula and for Butte-Silver Bow and over $50,000 for Anaconda-Deer Lodge. To the extent that information and education are supportive this provision must be considered facilitative. Study commissioners must exercise care that the public does not receive the impression that public money is being squandered in this exercise. And, since state subsidies have not been budgeted for transitions in the event of passage, they must be prepared to rebut arguments over the costs of change which are to be made in the case of consolidation.

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[42]"However, the quality and type of reorganization study does not appear to be a critical factor in determining the passage or failure of the reform proposal by the electorate... most case studies conclude that the study itself appears to hold little weight with the public." (Marando, 1974, pp. 237, 238).

Voter review, for all of its flexibility, imposed some restrictions on the scope of study commission study and the content of proposals for change. But these conditions also can be considered supportive because they limit the study commissioners' mandate to manageable tasks and keep certain potentially contentious issues off the agenda. Foremost among these proscribed subjects are the school system and the judicial process. The effect of these extraneous issues will be minimized in comparison to other consolidations where they confounded both the bargaining process in the drafting stage and the campaign over the consolidation plan.

Aspects of voter review legislation specifically applicable to city-county consolidations are also facilitative. Double majorities, a requirement which has defeated other consolidation attempts, are unnecessary. One county-wide vote is taken after the two study commissions agree to place the proposition on the ballot. A convincing majority within the city is capable of negating the expected opposition from both suburban fringe and rural areas. Some additional arguments for persuading these out-of-city folk is provided by the stipulation that the consolidated unit is the successor to both the city and the county governments and possesses the powers of each. Neither unit is really abolished since each becomes part of a strenthened county government. Again, it is up to the study commissioners to use effectively the campaign argument that no one "loses" their government.

In summary, the various properties of the Montana voter review process taken together provide a relatively conducive

environment for the achievement of city-county consolidation. The process provides an opportunity to test the hypothesis that a carefully designed and promoted consolidation plan can succeed in the absence of social or political upheaval, especially where it has the reinforcement of simultaneous activity of a similar nature in neighboring communities.[43] The deceptively simple fact that every community is experiencing the same process activates the influences of emulation, familiarity, recognition and reassurance regardless of the specific proposals which are being offered. Consolidation cannot be labeled a "freak" alternative, as it was in Silver Bow County in 1963: it is no longer an isolated attempt to reorganize a local government.

THREE CASES: A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

The exploratory framework used for analyzing and comparing the Montana consolidations applies several of the assumptions contained in the literature surveyed earlier in this paper. The variables to be considered fall into three categories: (1) situational; (2) proposal; (3) campaign. The situational variables include the usual constellation of urban conditions which produce consolidation as a topic of study and the context of community demography which provides the test of voter support. The

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[43] There is some possibility of negative association but it is in the direction away from the consolidation efforts. Some moderate proposals could be damaged if it can be shown that the entire process is a conspiracy leading to regionalism by the fact of three important counties abolishing the city governments within them.

proposal variables include the ingredients of the actual plan, including the nature and degree of change proposed and the dynamics of compromise and accomodation in the drafting of the proposal. Campaign variables include the process by which perceptions of both the problem and the propriety of the plan are produced and made congruent for the voters.[44] This framework allows for testing the relative importance of crisis, of longitudinal and latitudinal reinforcement of reform, of the solution's fit to the problem and of vehicles of communication which promote awareness of the consolidation alternative.

(1) Situational Variables: Social, Economic and Political Demography. Focus here will be on two main categories: the environmental conditions and the previous experience in responding to the problems they pose. Metropolitan area consolidations usually are proposed in medium-sized areas,[45] ones large enough to experience the problems of duplication, overlap, service inefficiency and related malaise which justify the need for consolidation yet not so large that the task of drafting and

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[44] It is important to emphasize that perception is the key to explanation of consolidation outcomes. The Rosenbaum-Henderson approach concludes that, after all, it is awareness of the conditions which makes them real. If so, there are ways of creating the impression of crisis, insufficient response or power deflation. The A.C.I.R. summary of factors working against consolidation lists the first as "the absence of a critical situation to be remedied, or at least absence of a widespread recognition of such a situation." (1962, p. 7).

[45] The nation's largest consolidation in this century includes the one million people of Indianapolis-Marion County and was created without the requirement of voter approval. (Willbern, 1973, p. 48).

selling a merger plan becomes insurmountable.[46] The scale of Montana's urban areas is small by any standard. Still, the same set of problems can be identified[47] and elimination of jurisdictions in smaller communities which do not benefit from scale economies is certainly a worthwhile objective.

Size by itself is, of course, not the determining factor. It provides only the framework within which the importance of other variables can be explained. Size helps determine the nature of the territorial components (core city, urban fringe, rural fringe) and the degree of differentiation among them,[48] the pattern of economic interdependence, and the number of existing local governmental units. The key variable is the complexity of the local infrastructure and the patterns of cooperation and conflict among its parts. And size constrains this complexity and the extent of these patterns.[49] Size also influences the campaign variables to the extent that an intensive direct contact public education process is capable of reaching a large segment of the voters.

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[46] This expectation corresponds to Marando's analysis that "...the small size of the Virginia metropolitan areas involved leads to less complex local governmental situations and a higher probability of reorganization support." (1974, p. 233).

[47] "While the problems of urbanization in Missoula County are nowhere near the scale they are in the nation's larger centers, they are no less real." Missoula County Comprehensive Plan, 1975, p. 5.

[48] Hawkins suggests that smaller urban areas (of the South and Southwest in his study) might have less intense life-style differences between core city and suburban fringe which could account for greater mutuality of purpose in supporting a consolidation. (1967, p. 71).

[49] Marando notes: "...there are major differences in the reorganization approaches pursued that vary by size of metropolitan area and region of the country that in effect make for a wide variation in the politics of reform." (1974, p. 230).

Political variables include the nature of the local party system and the prevalent local political culture, especially the level of interest in and concern with local government. This political culture helps determine whether local service delivery problems continue unnoticed or are made a priority on the local civic agenda. The degree of severity of current urban problems can be classified according to merely financial and service difficulties, crisis, or major scandal situations. Are these conditions enough to guarantee consolidation's success or must another set of conditions be explored? The other set includes the past record of reform or integrative experience and tests the assumption that reform is accepted once it has been made familiar or routine.

Missoula-Missoula County

Missoula's demographic setting both implies a clear need for consolidation and contains severe impediments to consolidation's success at the polls. The city of Missoula is the single incorporated unit (population 29,000 in 1970) in a county of 58,000. But since 22,000 live in the urban fringe area, approximately 60 percent of the urban population subsidizes the remaining 40 percent in the provision of many urban services. Growth in the preceding ten year period was 64 percent in the urban area compared with only nine percent for the city itself. Continued population expansion is projected for outside of the city limits. The city has fought a losing annexation battle for twenty years. It has little leverage to compel residents to join since water is supplied privately and septic tanks have

been considered adequate by most suburban residents. While there is some duplication of city and county governmental functions, the main issue is tax equity rather than inefficiency resulting from overlapping governments.

The expanding size of the urban fringe reflects the intensification of the problem. There has been steady growth in the city all-purpose mill levy rate of more than three percent per year between 1965-1975, and while the budget itself has more than doubled during the same period, the city is now up against the limit of its ability to provide adequate service levels. Suburban residents, therefore, constitute the key to the consolidation effort. To the extent that the fringe residents enjoy the benefits of a healthy trade center without supporting the costs of services, this large bloc constitutes a bulwark against consolidation.

The political climate in Missoula offers no great hope for consolidation's success. No scandal or crisis has caught local government officials in its net. There is some dissatisfaction with the city government for its seeming inability to set a budget within the constraints of its revenues. The county government has been modernizing incrementally and gives an impression of solidity to county residents. There is no grass-roots dissatisfaction with either governmental unit and little possibility that local officials will be caught in the middle of a cross-fire of charges and countercharges over local government inadequacy.

If successful, consolidation probably will have to be interpreted as the culmination of a long process of trying to

convince people that a more rational method of delivering local services is possible. Missoula has a colorful record of attempts to "rationalize" local government structure. A special act for a Missoula consolidation died in the legislature in 1933 and local consolidation committees failed to generate sufficient interest in 1946, 1953 and again in 1964. An interlocal cooperation commission was appointed in 1969 to advise the two local governments on areas of mutual concern. The group was given little support by either government and it went out of existence in 1974 after making a recommendation that some form of unified government be created.

Local residents are familiar with ballot reform proposals. In this century, Missoula has tried each of the three principal forms of municipal government: mayor-council (1900-1911 and 1958-1976), commission (1911 - 1954) and manager (1954 - 1958). The activities surrounding the adoption and abandonment of the manager plan are recent enough that many people are likely to inject old issues into the upcoming campaign. The persistent annexation struggle of the last twenty years has polarized community sentiment and serves to remind fringe voters of the good reasons why they should oppose consolidation. Missoula, therefore, has a lively record of reform experience and only the referendum vote will determine whether the legacy is positive or negative.

Butte-Silver Bow County

Butte's consolidation efforts emanate from even greater need. Once the thriving metropolitan giant of Montana, this

city has experienced several decades of steady economic decline and population exodus. From an estimated peak of 90,000 at the century's turn, the city population fell to 28,000 in 1960 and to 23,000 in 1970. The loss of population and tax base is severe by itself but the problem is exacerbated by the exodus into the urban fringe area. This area constitutes about 17,000 and is stable in comparison to the city population: thus, the exodus has not been far enough and the fringe imbalance continues to grow.

Butte is a city on a hill where an open mining pit gouges into more of the property tax base each year. In the last 15 years, that tax base has increased by only 15 percent. The inner city subsidizes the urban fringe (60% - 40%) and it is clear that it is becoming increasingly incapable of doing so. Butte's economy suffers from the decline in the mining industry and has managed to survive only through large grants from model cities and urban renewal. Now, federal grants for local energy research are forthcoming but this source is not a long range solution. As in Missoula, annexation is not likely to halt the shift of the property tax base to the flatland. There is a proposal to relocate the downtown area in the unincorporated area. Eventually, this relocation of the entire city would solve the problem but it does not enhance the present ability of the city to operate under a dismal set of economic, taxing and service conditions.

The urban area contains over 90 percent of the population in what is the state's smallest county. Rural problems and rural voters will not be a significant factor. But consolidation

faces the problem of Walkerville, an incorporated town of 1,000 which is really a neighborhood of Butte. Residents of Walkerville are very defensive about their own governmental structure even though it depends on help from both the city of Butte and the county to provide services like roads and streets and law enforcement. The inclusion of the town Walkerville within the consolidation would help simplify the service delivery structure but its exclusion from the consolidation would not cripple the effort to attain greater efficiency. The decision of the Walkerville study commission to retain Walkerville's incorporated status by staying out of the consolidation also keeps tax equity from being achieved. And, despite the fact that the town's status will not be affected, the parochial attitudes of its residents will be a significant factor in their vote as county residents to merge Silver Bow County with Butte.

Butte has a political culture of its own, unique in Montana and probably in the United States. Where else would residents insist on a title like Butte, America? Consolidation's proponents insist that voter review across Montana will have no effect on the consolidation outcome since Butte politics alone have always determined the way Butte votes. Butte-Silver Bow consolidationists are three-time losers (1923, 1931, 1963) who insist on another attempt.

When consolidation first was proposed in 1923, A. R. Hatton wrote in the National Municipal Review: "There can be no doubt that this act offers to the people of Silver Bow County a government of exceptional powers, flexibility and responsibility. If it should be accepted by the voters the "city and county of Butte"

is likely to become a model to be widely copied throughout the United States." The "city and county of Butte" came very close to providing that model. The defeat was by a narrow margin of less than a thousand in a vote of 14,000. In 1931, a special consolidation plan was defeated by 9,000 to 6,000. In 1963 the proponents argued that victory would undoubtedly bring an All-American city award. That effort went down by 10,000 to 6,000, or the worst showing to date.

In the past consolidation efforts, the opponents were the good guys and local officials stood square against change. This campaign promises to find local officials squaring off against each other. A very popular and effective mayor repeatedly has called for consolidation while county officials remain opposed. There is widespread and allegedly growing discontent with the county commissioners and the county government suffers accordingly. There is reason to believe that incapacity of current officials will emerge as a central part of the campaign although a scandal is unlikely. A sense of crisis also may not materialize. In 1963, the situation was desperate but last minute economic forecasts brightened prospects. This time, the promise of a massive federal energy research grant may take the edge off the current economic depression.

Anaconda-Deer Lodge County

Anaconda is located just a few miles down the road from Butte in Deer Lodge County, the state's second smallest in territory. This old company town is the site of copper reduction facilities for the corporate giant whose name it bears. Like

Butte, Anaconda has depended heavily on mining interests and has declined correspondingly as the economic situation has worsened over the years. Anaconda is the state's 9th largest city (population 10,000) in the 12 largest county (population 15,000). Both city and county experienced more than 15 percent population loss between 1960 and 1970. Growth forecasts promise no change in trend.

The logic of consolidation in this setting is slightly different than that for Butte or Missoula. As in those cases, the critical question is not overlap or duplication but the more immediate problem of providing minimum city services with a property tax base that has reached legal mill levy limits. Both city and county governments are too small to provide services efficiently. But unlike Butte and Missoula, Anaconda has no urban fringe and thus no "freeloader" tax equity problem. The principal question is tax and service equalization across a population which is divided (60-40) into urban and rural sections. Like the Butte-Silver Bow case, the small territorial size of the county helps promote a single community of interest despite the clear rural-urban division.

Still, voter approval in Anaconda-Deer Lodge would appear to be the least likely of the three cases if it is true that rural fringe voters are less supportive even than urban fringe voters.[50] The rural residents must become convinced that equalized tax burdens will bring better services, such as improved

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[50] Even in the smaller Virginia consolidations, most comparable to the Montana experience, the rural distance phenomenon holds. Marando notes: "the opposition has usually been strongest among people living farthest from the center of the metropolitan area." (1974, p. 23).

law enforcement, to the pockets of population east and west of Anaconda. The small territorial size and limited population make it possible to conduct a campaign on the theme of one community of interest.

The political history of local government and its reform in Anaconda-Deer Lodge County is bland in comparison with the other two settings. There have been no significant reform efforts since the original county-splitting era at the turn of the century. Until recently, there has been satisfaction with the city and county governments and their legitimacy maintained in the corresponding urban and rural areas.

Nevertheless, consolidation's proponents believe that the time is ripe to capitalize on what might prove to be a fleeting reform momentum. This perception prompted the decision to move the referendum election up to June from November. The reform impetus hinges on the "mall issue." In 1974, following years of debate, the city council approved an urban renewal program for construction of a downtown mall despite the negative decision of the city electorate in an advisory referendum. Strong feelings have prevailed ever since because people believe their vote is meaningless. The legitimacy of council decisions is questioned because the same majority serves on the council. The consolidation plan may capture support from both sides of the mall issue, from the opponents who see the opportunity to punish the city and from the proponents who see the opportunity for city growth and development in an expanded city-county.

Disgust with city officials over the mall issue has fed growing criticism of city government incapacity in many areas,

especially the inability to balance service delivery costs and tax revenues. The city has exceeded the tax levy limits for years and annually requires judgment tax approval to stay in business. Even though this is the fault of an inadequate tax base, it is city officials who hear the brunt of criticism. The referendum outcome depends heavily on the ability of the city voters to tie together all of these issues with general distrust of public officials. A relatively minor issue in a community this small might constitute the "crisis" in the Rosenbaum-Henderson model necessary to "throw the rascals out."

On the other hand, there is also a good record of functional consolidation between the two governments in areas such as libraries, recreation and planning. Consolidation can be portrayed as the culmination of evolutionary cooperation over the years and the logical answer to the service needs of the entire area. Consolidation's proponents hope to build on both the theme of "one community, one government," and the mall crisis.

Summary

All three situations contain some similar economic and demographic circumstances. There is a single economic community of interest and one trade center pattern in each. All are small enough in size and territory that creating the solution is manageable and effective campaigns could be waged. The urban governmental setting is not complex and only Silver Bow contains an additional local government unit competing for the loyalties of its citizens.

The most important differential consideration is the nature

of the urban fringe.[51] In Butte and Missoula the core city contains only 60 percent of the urban population. To the extent that the residents of the fringe perceive the benefits of their current status, they can veto the consolidations. To the extent that a campaign can instill the ethic of "public regardedness" and convey the arguments of fundamental tax fairness and orderly development, there is an opportunity to win. In Anaconda, the large rural minority requires few benefits of urban government. The key question is whether or not the rural residents will behave as they have elsewhere on issues of this kind.

The distribution of population gives none of the three consolidations a decided advantage over the others. Anaconda has the largest rural component to address but also the least complex campaign setting. Missoula has the largest urban fringe but also the one with the highest SES residents--and none of it has a salient competing structural loyalty. Butte has a large urban fringe and the problem of an additional incorporated neighbor.

According to the political variable examined, Butte appears to have the best prospect for success. Economic stagnation and a steadily degenerating tax situation combine with current disenchantment with county officials to create a climate of receptivity to change. The past record of pursuing consolidation

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[51] Although Watson and Romani found no evidence of more favorable city voting in their study of Cleveland's multiple referendums on metropolitan charter issues. (1961, p. 374).

will make it difficult for opponents to depict consolidation as a radical or freak solution. Accordingly, Butte offers the best test of the Rosenbaum-Henderson thesis that comprehensive consolidation can result only under conditions of revolution. Or it may confirm the thesis that political integration is facilitated by a record of previous integrative experience. Consolidation might have become more acceptable as the solution to the continuing problem simply because of its greater familiarity this time around.

In all three cases, the nature of the proposal offered and the degree of commitment to selling the proposal should be capable of making the difference between victory and defeat.

(2) Proposal Variables. Opponents to consolidation typically pledge adherence to the principle itself but claim an inability to support the plan "as drafted." This disclaimer is usually rationalization for core opposition but it is simple logic that the amount and nature of the actual change proposal will affect the attitudes of people who take the time to learn something about it. People may not vote for the plan simply because it includes a feature they like but they will vote against it because of one negative feature they recognize. It is hypothesized that the chances of success will be directly related to the extent to which a plan achieves the central goal of consolidation while leaving little else unchanged.

Missoula-Missoula County

This joint commission has experienced the greatest internal conflict over both the basic commitment to consolidation itself

and the details to be contained in the actual plan. The drafting stage has provided several tests of commissioner willingness to compromise on secondary issues in order to preserve consensus on the central goal. At certain junctures it appeared that consolidation would be abandoned in favor of each commission proposing a less complicated alternative for its own jurisdiction. However, the process of approving a final document reflected awareness of the need to stay within the bounds of public tolerance of change.

Initially, the joint commission was deadlocked for several months over the strategy necessary to achieve consolidation. One group favored a disincorporation strategy which provided for a June vote on a progressive county alternative form followed by a city disincorporation vote in November. This strategy would have achieved consolidation by avoiding the need for approval by either the urban fringe or the rural element. This approach was abandoned on the grounds that voters would believe it to be too complicated (and even devious) and because it posed other legal problems.

Other examples confirm the political astuteness of the study commission. The group has taken advantage of the option of placing a potentially contentious auxiliary issue on the ballot as separate voting choice. They have decided to let the voters decide whether the core of the new system will be an elected executive or an appointed manager. This decision broke a joint commission voting deadlock but achieved a possibly more important goal as well: the campaign may be waged between proponents of the two forms of executive with this "suboption"

siphoning off the hostility to consolidation itself. The elected executive gives the voters a choice to retain a familiar feature of local government.

Other aspects of the plan of government also are familiar. The administrative structure, including administrative centralization and a department system, is very similar to that currently used in the city. But this approach means elimination of the long list of county row officers, except for the county prosecutor, and represents threatening change to most rural county and some city residents. The addition of community councils is intended to replace the loss of those elective positions. After much debate, the joint commission decided to retain partisan elections as the familiar battleground for both political parties. The principle of broader county representation was adopted by enlarging the number of county commissioners from three to nine to compensate for the loss of 12 city council representatives. But the three districts of nomination of county commissioners was left unchanged as part of the strategy of staying with accustomed features.

Great care has been taken to assuage fear of increased taxation by fixing the initial boundaries of the urban service area to the existing city and providing only for inflationary increases in tax rates outside of the city limits for a period of two years. Existing special service districts are guaranteed for the present. Otherwise, the commission is given significant power to alter the boundaries of the urban service district at a later time. Change in this case has been postponed in order to soften the perception of change. Employees are guaranteed

jobs, salaries and benefits through the transition. But, city and county departments will be totally merged and in areas such as law enforcement this change is very threatening to employees.

Butte-Silver Bow County

Because of the legacy of struggle over consolidation it might be expected that study commissioners in the Butte-Silver Bow case would be as politically astute and perhaps more conflictual than Missoula's. The first part of this assessment is true. Like Missoula, seven commissioners were elected from each jurisdiction. Each person selected was a veteran of the 1963 campaign and most ran with some idea of either proposing or opposing a new consolidation effort. But through some combination of deteriorating conditions, availability of a more reasonable consolidation plan and an unidentified group dynamic, a solid consensus has grown around the central goal of consolidation.

Disputes within the study commission have taken place within this consensus. Compromise reflects the respect which the group has for the judgment of its individual members regarding necessary accomodations to the community. There is some anxiety that too much pragmatism will smother principle in this process of compromise[52] but no one knows better than the study commissioners the extent of the need for accomodation and presentation

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[52] Zeller identifies this dynamic as one of the key impediments in the Portland-Multnomah drafting process with: "so many little groups with their axes to grind the comission could not possible take every criticism or suggestion and incorporate it into the charter." (1974, p. 19).

of a form of government consistent with the local political culture. The proponents learned this bitter lesson in 1963 when the enabling legislation forced proposal of a manager plan and non-partisan elections. Both of these aspects of the consolidation were anathema in a county containing 70 percent strong partisan Democrats.

The consolidation plan is not complete because the final report is not due until August. The tentative draft reflects commitment to only those changes which are crucial to the goal of consolidation. The joint commission intends to propose the strong executive form which currently operates with favor in the city of Butte. Partisan elections are retained. The size of the commission probably will be enlarged to twelve elected from double-member districts, in order to approximate the familiar conditions of the city ward system. To satisfy residents attached to the county government, as many as necessary of the traditional elected county row officers will be retained.

The issue of equitable tax and service districts remains unresolved. There appears to be agreement on the expediency of postponing the equalization of taxing burdens past the transition period. But there is a lack of agreement over which services would eventually be delivered county-wide at equal cost to taxpayers and which services would be provided only in an urban service district. There is also continued uncertainty over the status of the volunteer fire districts which rim the city and have resisted annexation in order to maintain the urban fringe tax differential. The extent of compromise is still open, but city and county workers are likely to be guaranteed jobs.

Anaconda-Deer Lodge County

The process by which consolidation has been proposed and the plan drafted is much different for Anaconda-Deer Lodge County than for the other two cases. The study commission itself is different in composition than the other two joint commissions and more nearly represents the model of noblesse oblige.[53] A group of dedicated, respected citizens pursued a moral obligation to make the community a better place to live and sought conscientiously to fulfill the voter review mandate to the strict letter of the law. Complete with a stable hierarchy of command, a clear and rational division of labor, a comprehensive PERT chart and unbridled enthusiasm, they accomplished a careful and detailed study of the current forms of government and their problems.

The facts spoke conclusively: consolidation was the only answer. The joint commission was duly formed and the group proceeded along a new timetable leading to a plan of consolidation. Subsequent decisions seemed to fall into place as the group decided that writing a charter both allowed for greater structural flexibility and enhanced the plan's voter appeal. The election date was moved up from November to June once it was established that there was time to draft the charter and that the voters would be more receptive to the idea in June than November.

The shortened study time quickened the pace for the joint study commission. Perhaps the deadlines of the systematic work

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[53] Bollens and Schmandt, (1961, p. 438).

schedule account for the propensity to compromise among the members. This absence of conflict is reflected in a streamlined plan of consolidation that contains very few of the accomodations found in either the Missoula charter or the Butte-Silver Bow proposal. The plan of government approximates the local ideal for efficient, responsive government. The study commission feels that the time is ripe to achieve a fundamental structural reform along with consolidation and they have made less of an effort to identify and placate the concerns of community voting blocs.

The core of the consolidation proposal is the manager plan. This was not a unanimous decision, but once made it has not divided the joint commission. Although the partisan climate is similar to Butte's, the question of partisan and non-partisan elections has been placed as a ballot supoption for separate voter selection. Remarkably, all county row officers except the county prosecutor have been made appointive despite the large percentage of rural county voters. Community councils are included to help expand representation but the size of the county commission has been increased from three to only five in anticipation of the argument of excessive government. City and county employees have been guaranteed employment through the transition period.

The charter gives the county commission broad power to equalize taxation throughout the county and to abolish existing special tax districts. And there is no prohibition on equalizing rates of taxation during the transition period. There is a charter stipulation that no new form of taxation can be imposed

without a vote of the people. Thus, while the study commission has recognized the importance of the taxation issue to referendum outcomes, they have also provided the county commission the authority ultimately to create the most streamlined of the three possible consolidations.

Summary

The majorities on all three joint study commissions have operated on two assumptions: (1) it is better to keep the charter brief, taking the risk that public fears concerning omissions are less damaging than public reaction to the inclusion of inordinate detail; (2) unnecessary change must be minimized and certain guarantees of continuity included. The Butte-Silver Bow group has gone the furthest with the continuity principle while the Anaconda-Deer Lodge group apparently believes that radical change can succeed. Missoula's must rank as one of the unique experiments in the efforts to achieve consolidation: the voters have been given the choice of how much change they desire in the office of the executive in addition to their basic choice over consolidation. This case may provide the best test of the assumption that a consolidation which retains familiar structures has a better chance than one which also includes changes to unfamiliar structural forms.

(3) Campaign Variables. This assessment of the situational and proposal variables leaves the impression that each of the consolidations can pass at the polls, depending on the dynamics of

the campaign process.[54] The final evaluation of the three Montana consolidations must await careful analysis of the campaign roles played by the following factors: the study commissioners themselves, elected officials, community notables in support and opposition groups, the network of organized community groups and the media. Case study analysis will include participant-observer techniques, interview role analysis of the study commissioners, election returns analysis and survey research of resident and voter attitudes to determine what and how messages were received.

Some preliminary observations can be made about the roles played by the study commissioners. Roles in the campaign stage are really extensions of roles played during the drafting stage. If compromise and accomodation has characterized the drafting stage, there is likely to be recognition of the requirements of political acumen and activity in the campaign stage. Too many charter efforts have failed because study commissioners believed that their job ended with the study itself. The merits of proposals seldom speak for themselves. Most of the study commissioners in the three consolidation efforts have accepted this reality.

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[54]The success in Lexington-Fayette County demonstrates that an organized campaign effort in a city of manageable size can be a sufficient factor. (Zeller, 1972). McArthur claims that the essential difference between Nashville's failure in 1958 and success in 1962 was the nature of the campaign and the commitment of leaders to it. (1973).

Missoula-Missoula County

Not all members of the joint study commission found the compromises in the final plan acceptable. Two of fourteen voted against the plan and have filed minority reports. Given their history of debate over numerous charter provisions it is probably surprising that this much consensus exists among the commissioners. The choice of a June election probably was made with two considerations in mind: the burn-out factor and the fragile consensus. The Missoula group worked harder than any other study commission (partly because conflict has produced considerable non-productive output) and efforts probably could not have been sustained until November. And the belief that the whole process could come unstuck by them is confirmed by the record to date.

There will not be a united front in the campaign. With some study commissioners on each side of the issue, the dialogue could become heated. All of the study commissioners are politically knowledgeable and expect a typical reorganization campaign. Citizen's groups are being organized on each side. The proponents include the proverbial reform triology--League of Women Voters, Chamber of Commerce and the University community. This group will have to enlarge its endorsement base to key groups such as labor, the Democratic party and local government employees if consolidation is to win. The majority of elected officials is likely to be actively or passively opposed. The local media is basically supportive to date.

The campaign challenge is an imposing one. The proponents

must develop sets of arguments to deal with three district groups of voters. The outlying rural communities cannot be written off even though there is little in the plan to stimulate euphoria among them. The large bloc of voters in the urban fringe has to be persuaded of some concrete advantages in addition to appeals to their "public regarding" nature. City residents must believe that the city is on the rocks. The combination of the June election, the manageable community size, and the commitment of proponents to conduct a person-to-person campaign give the plan a chance to succeed.

Butte-Silver Bow County

The campaign period should prove to be a continuation of the process begun in the drafting stage. The approach in Butte-Silver Bow has been markedly different from Missoula's. Acting as "delegates" rather than as "trustees," the study commissioners conducted a survey of public attitudes, found favor for consolidation and then proposed consolidation as the public's first choice. They will have the advantage of taking their plan to the public in the campaign as the people's document.

An important component of the campaign stage will be the series of task forces which have been established to draft different parts of the charter. Each task force has included parts of the community or the existing local governments--law enforcement, other government employees, rural areas--which will be affected by any change. This process of accomodation has slowed the drafting process but the goal is a document which all of these groups will be able to support in November.

The 1963 consolidation campaign epitomized the political nature of any consolidation process. It is actually surprising that the plan did as well as it did under the circumstances of an intensive assault on managers as dictators, loss of voting rights, manipulation of the judiciary and consolidation as a socialist conspiracy. Because of the legacy of 1963, the campaign activists, including the study commissioners, are aware of the need for and knowledgeable about the dynamics of a hard-hitting referendum campaign. The study commissioners expect support from groups which were in opposition in 1963. They have the active endorsement of a popular mayor and other officials in contrast to 1963 when virtually the entire slate of elected officials opposed the change.

The key to consolidation's success may well lie with the voters of Walkerville. In 1963, the mayor of Walkerville was the undisputed flagbearer in the crusade against consolidation. The residents voted 90 percent in opposition. Because they are not included in the plan as city residents this time, they might be expected to be less fearful of a threat to swallow them up--or even neutral if they can be persuaded that a consolidation which does not include Walkerville as a legal part is the best of both worlds. If portrayed properly, consolidation might be an idea whose time has come in Butte. No other community has practiced more to get an acceptable consolidation plan. A fierce pride in their city might prompt residents to adopt a consolidation theme of a "bigger and better Butte." Unique, not freak, might be the label of consolidation in 1976.

Anaconda-Deer Lodge County

This group of study commissioners is the most optimistic about the chances for their consolidation plan. Perhaps their sanguine attitude is attributable to the high level of internal consensus they have developed or to the relative absence of previous local experience with reform efforts. They have developed a plan with radical changes and they have a large rural population to convince to accept it. But they are close to community opinion and have the best opportunity of the three cases to stage a person-to-person public education effort.

While neophytes in many respects, these commissioners have always responded to new roles as the pace of study commission activity quickened. They accept the fact that opposition will arise to their proposal and are prepared to defend it actively. Unlike Missoula they have not engineered a citizens' support group. Rather, they expect the citizens task forces which were formulated to help write parts of the charter to provide independent endorsement. This may present a problem if the members of the task forces resent the truncation of their efforts which was necessitated by the acceleration of the process to meet a June election.

This decision to take the proposal to the public in June reflected the judgment of the study commissioners that the issue of the mall and dissatisfaction with city government would produce a victory. The belief is that rural residents will see the benefits of better service delivery. Opposition from local officials is expected but may prove to promote a "throw the

rascals out" theme. Local government workers seem satisfied with charter provisions. The media has been supportive. Neither labor nor the Anaconda Company (whose tax rates will be affected) have come out in opposition.

Consolidation is not the ugly word in Anaconda that it is in Butte. Study commissioners believe that fear and emotion will not play a part in the outcome. There is time for a public dialogue on the merits of the proposal and it is possible that the outcome in Anaconda-Deer Lodge will be one based on informed expectations of the actual impact of change. If not, then the study commission must rest its hope on the emotive value of the theme of "one community, one government."

SUMMARY

There might be a tendency to minimize the importance of the Montana consolidation experience because of the lack of comparability to complex urban settings where problems are more acute. Although, on a smaller scale, the problems prompting the Montana consolidations as solutions are very similar to those in metorpolitan areas. The outcome may illustrate the reality that structural solutions can be developed to keep urban settings from growing into jungles where consolidation is too late as an answer. The lesson may apply to communities of simi-size where, especially in the west, haphazard urban fringe

growth is impending.[55]

And, regardless of size, the process of consolidation is still similar for purpose of theoretical comparisons. If the Montana consolidations farewellthere would be a basis for doubting the validity of the Rosenbaum-Henderson "revolution" model and a justification for taking a much closer look at the process by which consolidation initially is framed as an alternative. Some account must be taken of the impediments in law and institutional inertia which keep social disequilibrium from being converted into civic agenda choices. Can artificial stimulation overcome these impediments and even substitute for some of the other allegedly necessary conditions of successful consolidation? Are emulation and replicability important success factors?[56]

Success in Montana would also suggest the need for more detailed analysis of the effect of two additional factors: (1) the process by which the consolidation plan is adjusted to

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[55] The utility of this lesson is endorsed by Grant: "One other deterent to the adoption of area-wide government for metropolitan communities is the failure of political scientists to distinguish between the problems of the older, larger, more complex metropolis and that of the newer, smaller, less comples metropolis...it is not yet too late to adopt effective area-wide government for the small-and medium-sized metropolitan areas in the United States." (1968, pp. 109, 110).

[56] Scott endorses this interpretation: "However, these facts of metropolitan political life are not necessarily permanently fixed. Indeed, there is evidence of an additional element in the process we have been describing, an element involving intergovernmental "learning."...Even the experience of defeating such a proposal serves to educate the voting public." (1968, p. 260).

reflect the reality of the degree of change which voters are likely to accept; and (2) the process by which the consolidation plan is communicated to the voters as a solution to existing problems. The smaller size of the Montana communities suggests strongly that this approach to a rational unfolding of the problem to voters can succeed where the greater stimuli in metropolitan settings make it very difficult.

On the other hand, if the Montana cases do not measure up even to the record of support for previous consolidations, then careful reassessment of the impact of the artificial accelerator of voter review is necessary. Low voter support would demonstrate that facilitating the pre-formulation process and simplifying the drafting choices cannot substitute for groundswell dissatisfaction strong enough to overcome initial inertia against change. This conclusion would extend to democratic theory: the people cannot be trusted to resolve issues of such great complexity. Instead of moving closer to Jacksonian populism in the Jeffersonian tradition of each generation's right choose a government, states should consider the Ontario-Las Vegas-Indianapolis model of assigning authority for restructuring local jurisdictions to legislatures or boundary commissions. The policy implications of this Montana process for her western neighbors are significant.

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